

Mountain Home Aquifer Working Group
of the
Expanded Natural Resources Legislative Interim Committee
Mountain Home City Hall Meeting Room
160 South 3rd East
Mountain Home, Idaho 83647

May 19, 2004*

Attendees: Chairman Representative Bert Stevenson
Committee members: Representatives Doug Jones and Peter Nielsen
Senator Tom Gannon
Members of the public: Sign-up sheet available from Legislative Services Office

Chairman Bert Stevenson called to order the meeting of the Mountain Home Aquifer Working Group at 9:35 a.m. on Wednesday, May 19, 2004, in the Mountain Home City Hall Meeting Room. Other committee members attending the meeting were Representative Peter Nielsen and Senator Tom Gannon; Representative Doug Jones joined the meeting at 10:05. Senator Fred Kennedy attended the meeting as an interested party.

After introductions, the Chairman expressed his appreciation for those who are taking the time to bring the working group up to speed on local issues. The working group primarily discussed domestic wells and supplemental water rights.

Domestic wells: Gary Spackman, Idaho Department of Water Resources (IDWR), presented a summary calculating that 819 wells were drilled in Basin 61 between 1988 and 2002. Most are assumed to be domestic wells, although some may not be. Almost twice as many wells (196) were drilled in both 2001 and 2002 as in previous years. Local residents attributed this trend to growth and predict it will probably continue.

In trying to determine the impact of those wells, questions were raised about average consumptive use. IDWR does not meter or report diversion for domestic use, but that information may be available from other sources. IDWR did not distinguish between wells in the ground water management area, critical ground water management area or other areas. Data from 2003 were not presented, but may be available.

Land Use Code: Senator Gannon reported that the proliferation of domestic wells may be affecting various aquifers around the state, but the extent of that affect is unknown. The Expanded Natural Resources Interim Committee might appoint a subcommittee to review land use code, identify mitigation opportunities and develop a state action plan.

Senator Gannon presented a range of land use options for local residents to consider implementing. Options ranged from placing a moratorium on all subdivisions to developing a global comprehensive plan for cities and counties, reviewing annexation plans and “area of impact” issues, and the use of low impact landscaping. Future land use planning may require that, when available, water previously used for irrigation remain on the land when it is developed for other uses. Idaho Rivers United (IRU) offered to develop a low impact landscape demonstration project if local residents are interested.

There are 46,328 Total Irrigated Acres in Basin 61 according to information reported by Shane Bendixsen, IDWR. Of those, 28,815 are ground water acres; 17,513 are surface water (15,451 from the Snake River); and 5,681 are surface and ground water (supplemental).

Supplemental water rights generated considerable discussion ranging from the definition of a supplement water right to its historic use and application, enlargement, and transfer issues. Supplemental water rights are a policy issue the state will probably have to address.

Mountain Home Irrigation District: Calvin Ireland reported on the Mountain Home Irrigation District's usage, flow patterns and management practices. The district encompasses 4,423 acres and an equal number of shares. Normal delivery consists of 3 acre/feet per share. Shareholders last received full delivery in 2000. This year the district estimates it will deliver 1 ¾ acre/feet and expects to be out of water by the 3rd week of August.

The district has three main storage areas: Little Camas Reservoir - 24,000 acre/feet; Long Tom – 3,800 acre/feet; and Mountain Home Reservoir – 5,800 acre/feet. Flood water is sometimes available for a maximum of two to three weeks. The district has tried to reduce its estimated 40% loss over the last two years, but is unable to document any impact due to drought. There may be tradeoffs between decreasing loss, replenishing the aquifer, and reducing the need for supplemental pumping. Some recharge water appears to be reaching the shallow aquifer, but is more difficult to track in the regional system.

Bennett Creek: The working group and local residents are trying to identify water sources. There may be up to 5,000 acre/feet available in Bennett Creek. It is fully appropriated and there is already a struggle between storage and natural flow. Other drainages should also be considered.

Changing Water Use Patterns: IDWR developed a map to depict the water years 1984, 1992, 1997, and 2003 and compared the effect of drought, varying water conditions and land use changes within the boundaries of the Ground Water Management Area & critical GWMA.

The next meeting will be held on **June 15, 2004, at 9:30 a.m.** in the Mountain Home City Hall Meeting Room. The committee will spend 45 minutes discussing the Nez Perce Agreement and its impact on local water users. To view the agreement, visit www2.state.id.us or www.doi.gov.

Representative Nielsen moved, with a second by Representative Jones, that the meeting be adjourned. The meeting adjourned at 11:25 a.m.

CONTACT INFORMATION:

Copies of the maps, studies and handouts are available to the public on the IDWR website at www.idwr.state.id.us/Committee

Meeting notices, agendas and minutes are available to the public at <http://www2.state.id.us/legislat/legislat.html>.

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*Minutes corrected as approved on June 15, 2004.